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Fantasies From the Fudge Factory

By William L. Givens

"Throughout the careerist ranks is a wistful yearning for good old days that really never were, a diplomatic Walter Mittyland in which an elite corps of professional diplomats, all looking and acting like George Kennan, have the President's ear . . ."

The author spent 10 years as a foreign service officer.

IF ALL THE foreign service officers who have written Master Plans for reforming the State Department were laid end to end they would reach from Washington to Harvard University, where they would find still more foreign service officers, on leave or retired, writing still more Master Plans.

The latest and by far the best written work yet in this bottomless genre is "The Foreign Affairs Fudge Factory" by John Franklin Campbell, a 30-year-old former staff assistant to under secretaries of state George Ball and Nicholas Katzenbach. Campbell is a first-rate journalist and an articulate advocate for the elitist—or, as he puts it, Hamiltonian—approach to the management of American foreign policy. For all its stylistic superiority, however, "Fudge Factory" turns out to be yet another apologia for our careerist diplomatic establishment and a plea to the President to restore the careerists to their "rightful" predominance in the foreign policy process.

It is a familiar refrain. Since World War II, the rationale goes, the State Department has been badly used by a succession of Presidents, most notably Franklin Roosevelt, who distrusted the foreign service ("the profession of perfection") and turned for advice to John Kennedy, who quickly grew frustrated with State's lack of enthusiasm

for his activist policies and depended increasingly upon "a new breed of military strategists and academic social scientists"; and Lyndon Johnson, whose secretive, idiosyncratic ways, fondness for contrived diplomatic spectacles, and repeated tinkering with State's administrative machinery further eroded State's waning influence. Publicly exhorting the State Department to take charge of the foreign policy-making process, Kennedy and Johnson tacitly denied the department the backing it needed to do so, allowed rival agencies to dominate State in the bureaucratic rough-and-tumble, and gradually transferred power to a burgeoning National Security Council staff in the White House.

Streamlining Prescribed

AS A CONSEQUENCE of all this, the careerists tell us, the State Department has lost control of the foreign affairs machinery it is supposed to be running. Its ranks swollen by military, intelligence and economic specialists, administrators, propagandists, and sundry other nondiplomatic outsiders, the department is far too big, both in Washington and overseas, and its authority fragmented among other agencies, most notably the Defense Department and the CIA.

What must be done, Campbell prescribes, is to streamline the State Department by reducing its personnel by half, reorganizing the remainder on leaner lines, and trimming out excess layers and extraneous functions. Overseas missions should be drastically pared, largely at the expense of the other executive agencies, and ambassadorial authority restored over all personnel in each American embassy. State should be given the authority and responsibility to prepare a single, unified foreign affairs budget for the entire government, and to control government personnel assigned overseas by all agencies. Horizontal clearances should be eliminated, and "each matter requiring action should be assigned to a single officer who must himself take responsibility for consulting (but not obtaining clearances from) other interested parties in the decision" to act. Finally, this new, lean State Department should be moved back into the old Executive Office Building, where it was housed in its pre-World II halcyon days, and where it could be closer to the President.

Well, fine. But if it is all so clear and simple, why don't they quit writing plans and do it? The careerists apparently feel it is the President's responsibility. But, alas, the President can't do other duties. All that a President can do for any executive agency is to give

it a clear charter and the authority it needs to carry out its responsibilities. For State, this has been done repeatedly; the foreign service simply has not been up to the task.

There is considerable evidence that the real problem is not State's organization or lack of authority, but the diplomats themselves—that they would be no more competent to manage the new, streamlined State Department they dream of than they have been to run the old one, and that the authority they are pleading for would soon, like Pinocchio's five gold pieces, slip again from their grasp into the hands of predators.

ITEM: One of John Kennedy's first acts upon taking office in 1961 was to issue a letter to all American ambassadors, authorizing and directing them to "oversee and coordinate all the activities of the U.S. government" in their countries. Through Secretary of State Dean Rusk he expressed the "active expectation" that State would "in fact take charge of foreign policy." President Johnson in 1966 instituted a top-level foreign policy-making body called the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG), installed State at the head of it, and directed Secretary Rusk to "assume responsibility to the full extent permitted by law for the over-all direction, coordination and supervision of interdepartmental activities of the U.S. government overseas," in what was pointedly identified as "formal and specific over-all directive authority from the President."

At the same time there was established in the State Department a country director for each nation, who was to assume the interdepartmental "direction, coordination, and supervisory" role at the working level and serve as a Washington counterpart to the ambassador in the field. Here, in a package, was all the authority a President can convey. But the diplomats were never able to find the handle. Tougher, savvier bureaucrats from the other agencies State was supposed to be leading continued riding roughshod over the department's prerogatives and driving ever deepening furrows into its influence. By mid-1968, the "young Turks" of the foreign service, in that year's version of the Master Reform Plan, were pleading once more for the President to "make clear that he regards American ambassadors as his (their emphasis) personal representatives to exercise, on his behalf, control over all United States government activity in the country."

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